

# MISS MINERVA and WILLIAM GREEN HILL

By FRANCES BOYD CALHOUN

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## CHAPTER I.

### A Scandalized Virgin.

The bus drove up to the gate and stopped under the electric street light. Perched on the box by the big, black negro driver sat a little boy whose slender figure was swathed in a huge rain coat.

Miss Minerva was on the porch waiting to receive him.

"Mercy on me, child," she said, "what on earth made you ride up there? Why didn't you get inside?"

"I jes' wanted to ride by Sam Lamb," replied the child as he was lifted down. "An' I see a nice fat little man name Major—"

"He jes' wouldn't ride inside, Miss Minerva," interrupted the driver, quickly, to pass over the blush that rose to the splinter's thin cheek at mention of the major. "Twan't no use ter try ter make him ride no whars but jes' up by me. He jes' 'fused an' 'fused an' 'sputed an' 'sputed; he jes' tuck ter me f'om de minute he got off'n de train an' sot eyes on me; he an' one easy chile ter git 'quainted wid; so I jes' 'bisted him up by me. Here an' his verlise, ma'am."

"Good-by, Sam Lamb," said the child as the negro got back on the box and gathered up the reins. "I'll see you to-morrow."

Miss Minerva imparted a thin, old-world kiss on the sweet, childish mouth. "I am your Aunt Minerva," she said, as she picked up his satchel. The little boy carelessly drew the back of his hand across his mouth.

"What are you doing?" she asked. "Are you wiping my kiss off?"

"Naw'm," he replied, "I's jes' a—I's arubbin' it in, I reckon."

"Come in, William," and his aunt led the way through the wide hall into a big bedroom.

"Tilly, ma'am," corrected her nephew.

"William," firmly repeated Miss Minerva. "You may have been called Billy on that plantation where you were allowed to run wild with the negroes, but your name is William Green Hill, and I shall insist upon your being called by it."

She stooped to help him off with his coat, remarking as she did so: "What a big overcoat; it is several sizes too large for you."

"Darned if it ain't," agreed the child promptly.

"Who taught you such a naughty word?" she asked in a horrified voice. "Don't you know it is wrong to curse?"

"You call that cussin'?" came in scornful tones from the little boy. "You don't know cussin' when you see it; you jest oughter hear ole Uncle Jimmy-Jawed Jup'ter, Aunt Cindy's hushan; he'll show you somer the pretties' cussin' you ever did hear."

"Who is Aunt Cindy?"

"She's the colored 'oman what tends to me ever sence me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln's born, an' Uncle Jup'ter is her hushan; an' he sho' is a stingeree on cussin'. Is yo' hushan' much of a cusser?" he inquired.

A pale pink dyed Miss Minerva's thin, sallow face.

"I am not a married woman," she replied, curtly, "and I most assuredly would not permit any oaths to be used on my premises."

"Well, Uncle Jimmy-Jawed Jup'ter is jest nachelly born' to cuss—he's got a reputation to keep up," said Billy.

He sat down in a chair in front of his aunt, crossed his legs and smiled confidentially up into her face.

"Tell an' damn is jest easy ev'ry day words to that nigger. I wish you could hear him cuss on a Sunday jest one time, Aunt Minerva; he'd sho' make you open yo' eyes an' take in yo' sign. But Aunt Cindy don't 'low me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln to say nothin' 't all only jest 'darn' tell we gits grown mens, an' puts on darn pants."

"Wilkes Booth Lincoln?" questioned his aunt.

"Ain't you never hear teller him?" asked the child. "He's ole Aunt Blue-Gum Tempy's Peruny Pearlina's boy; an' Peruny Pearlina," he continued enthusiastically, "she ain't no ordinary nigger, her hair ain't got nare kink an' she's got the grandes' clothes. They ain't nothin' s'ide 'bout her. She got ten chillens an' ev'ry single one of 'em's got a diff'ant pappy, she been married so much. They do say she got injun blood in her, too."

Miss Minerva, who had been standing prim, erect and stiff, fell limply into a convenient rocking chair, and looked closely at this orphaned nephew who had come to live with her.

She saw a beautiful, bright, attractive, little face out of which big, saucy, gray eyes shaded by long curling black lashes looked winningly at her; she saw a sweet, childish red mouth, a mass of short, yellow curls, and a thin but graceful little figure.

"I knows the names of aller ole Aunt Blue-Gum Tempy's Peruny Pearlina's chillens," he was saying proudly; "Admiral Farragut Moses the Prophet Esquire, he's the bigges'; an' Alice Ann Maria Dan Step-an'-Go-Fetch-it, she had to nuss all the res'; she say fas' as she git thoo nussin' one an' 'low she goin' to have a 'breathin' spell here come another one

an' she got to nuss it. An' the nex' is Mount Sinai Tabernicle, he name fer the church where ol' Aunt Blue-Gum Tempy's Peruny Pearlina takes her sackerment; an' the nex' is 'first Thessalonians; Second Thessalonians, he's dead an' gone to the Bad Place 'cause he skunt a cat—I don't mean skint the cat on an actin' pole like me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln does—he skunt a sho' nough cat what was a black cat, what was a ole witch, an' she come back an' ha'n't him, an' he growed thinner an' thinner an' weasler an' weasler, tell finly he wan't nothin' 'tall but a skel'ton, an' the Bad Man won't 'low nobody 'tall to give his parch tongue no water, an' he got to, ever after amen, be toast on a pitchfork. An' Oleander Magnolia Althea is the nex'," he continued, enumerating Peruny Pearlina's offspring on his thin, well-molded fingers, "she got the seven-year itch; an' Gettysburg, an' Middle-&-Brothers-Mercantile Co.; he name fer the sto' where ole Aunt Blue-Gum Tempy's Peruny Pearlina gits credit so she can pay when she fetches in ner cotton in the fall; an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln, him an' me's twins; we was borned the same day only I's borned to my mamma an' he's borned to his'n an' Doctor Jenkins fetched me an' Doctor Shackelfoot fetched him. An' Decimus Ultimus,"—the little boy triumphantly put his right forefinger on his left little one, thus making the tenth, "she's the baby an' she's got the colic an' cries loud 'nough to wake up Israel; Wilkes Booth Lincoln say he wish the little devil would die. Peruny Pearlina firs' name her 'Doctor Shackelfoot 'cause he fetches all her chillens, but the doctor he say that ain't no name fer a girl, so he name her Decimus Ultimus."

Miss Minerva, sober, proper, dignified, religious old maid unused to children, listened in frozen amazement and paralyzed silence. She decided to put the child to bed at once that she might collect her thoughts, and lay some plans for the rearing of this sadly neglected, little orphaned nephew.

"William," she said, "it is bedtime, and I know you must be sleepy after your long ride on the cars. Would you like something to eat before I put you to bed? I saved you some supper."

"Naw'm, I hain't hongry; the major man what I talk to on the train tuck me in the dinin'-room an' gimme all I could hol'; I jes' eat an' eat tell they wan't a wrinkle in me," was the reply. "He axed me 'bout you, too. Is he name Major Minerva?"

She opened a door in considerable confusion, and they entered a small, neat room adjoining.

"This is your own little room, William," said she, "you see it opens into mine. Have you a night-shirt?"

"Naw'm, I don't need no night-shirt. I jes' sleeps in my uncons and sometimes in my overalls."

"Well, you may sleep in your union suit tonight," said the scandalized relative, "and I'll see what I can do for you tomorrow. Can you undress yourself?"

Her small nephew wrinkled his nose, disdainfully. "Well, I reckon so," he scornfully made answer. "Me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln been undressin' usself ever sence we's born."

"I'll come in here after a while and turn off the light. Good night, William."

"Good-night, Aunt Minerva," responded the little boy.

## CHAPTER II.

### The Rabbit's Left Hind Foot.

A few minutes later, as Miss Minerva sat rocking and thinking, the door opened and a lean, graceful, little figure, clad in a skinny, gray union suit, came into the room.

"Ain't I a-goin' to say no prayers?" demanded a sweet childish voice. "Aunt Cindy hear me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln say us prayers ev'ry night sence we's born."

"Why, of course you must say your prayers," said his aunt, blushing at having to be reminded of her duty by this young heathen; "kneel down here by me."

Billy looked at his aunt's bony frame and thought of Aunt Cindy's soft, fat, ample lap. A wistful look crossed his childish face as he dropped down in front of her and laid his head against her knee, then the bright, beautiful little face took on an angelic expression as he closed his eyes and softly chanted:

"Now I lays me down to sleep, I prays the Lord my soul to keep, If I should die befo' I wake, I prays the Lord my soul to take."

"Keep 'way f'om me hoodoo an' witch, Lead my paf f'om the po'house gate, I pines fer the golden harps an' s'ich, Oh, Lord, I'll set an' pray an' wait."

"Oh, Lord, bless ev'rybody; bless me an' Aunt Cindy, an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln, an' Aunt Blue-Gum Tempy's Peruny Pearlina, an' Uncle Jimmy-Jawed Jup'ter, an' ev'rybody, an' Sam Lamb, an' Aunt Minerva, an' aller Aunt Blue-Gum Tempy's Peruny Pearlina's chillens, an' give Aunt Minerva a billy goat or a little nannny if she'd ruther, an' bless Major Minerva, an' make me a good boy like Sanctified Sophy, fer Jesus' sake. Amen."

"What is that you have fled around your neck, William?" she asked, as the little boy rose to his feet.

"That's my rabbit foot; you won't never have no 'sease 't all an' nobody can't never conjure you if you wears a rabbit foot. This here one is the lef' hin' foot; it was ketchd by a red-headed nigger with cross-eyes in a graveyard at twelve o'clock on a Friday night, when they's a full moon. He give it to Aunt Cindy to tie 'roun' my nake when I's a baby. Ain't you got no rabbit foot?" he anxiously inquired.

"No," she answered. "I have never had one and I have never been conjured either. Give it to me, William; I can't allow you to be superstitious," and she held out her hand.

"Please, Aunt Minerva, jest lemme wear it tonight," he pleaded. "Me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln's been wearin' us rabbit foots ever sence we's born."

"No," she said firmly; "I'll put a stop to such nonsense at once. Give it to me, William."

Billy looked up at his aunt's austere countenance and lovingly fingered his charm; he opened his mouth to say something, but hesitated; slowly he untied the string around his neck and laid his treasure on her lap; then without looking up, he ran into his own little room, closing the door behind him.

Soon afterward Miss Minerva, hearing a sound like a stifled sob coming from the adjoining room, opened the door softly and looked into a sad, little face with big, wide, open eyes shining with tears.

"What is the matter, William?" she coldly asked.

"I ain't never slep' by myself," he sobbed. "Wilkes Booth Lincoln always slept on a pallet by my bed ever sence we's born an'—an' I wants Aunt Cindy to tell me 'bout Uncle Pilgerk Peter."

His aunt sat down on the bed by his side. She was not versed in the ways of childhood, and could not know that the little boy wanted to pillow his head on Aunt Cindy's soft and ample bosom, that he was homesick for his black friends, the only companions he had ever known.

"I'll tell you a Bible story," she temporized. "You must not be a baby. You are not afraid, are you, William? God is always with you."

"I don't want no God," he sullenly made reply; "I wants somebody with sho' nough skin an' bones, an'—an' I wants to hear 'bout Uncle Pilgerk Peter."

"I will tell you a Bible story," again suggested his aunt. "I will tell you about—"

"I don't want to hear no Bible story, nether," he objected. "I wants to hear

the young sister whose child had now come to live with her. But on the night of Billy's arrival the stern, narrow woman sat for hours in her rocking chair, her mind busy with thoughts of that pretty young sister, dead since the boy's birth.

And now the wild, reckless, dissipated brother-in-law was dead, too, and the child had been sent to her; to the aunt who did not want him, who did not care for children, who had never forgiven her sister her unfortunate marriage. "If he had only been a girl," she sighed. What she believed to be a happy thought entered her brain.

"I shall rear him," she promised herself, "just as if he were a little girl; then he will be both a pleasure and a comfort to me, and a companion for my loneliness."

Miss Minerva was strictly methodical; she worked ever by the clock, so many hours for this, so many for that. William, she now resolved, for the first time becoming really interested in him, should grow up to be a model young man, a splendid and wonderful piece of mechanism, a fine, practical, machine-like individual, moral, upright, religious. She was glad that he was young; she would begin his training on the morrow. She would teach him to sew, to sweep, to churn, to cook, and when he was older he should be educated for the ministry.

"Yes," said Miss Minerva; "I shall be very strict with him just at first, and punish him for the slightest disobedience or misdemeanor, and he will soon learn that my authority is not to be questioned."

And the little boy who had never had a restraining hand laid upon him in his short life? He slept sweetly and innocently in the next room, dreaming of the care-free existence on the plantation and of his idle, happy, negro companions.

## CHAPTER III.

### The Willing Worker.

"Get up, William," said Miss Minerva, "and come with me to the bathroom; I have fixed your bath."

The child's sleepy eyes popped wide open at this astounding command.

"Ain't this here Wednesday?" he asked sharply.

"Yes; today is Wednesday. Hurry up or the water will get cold."

"Well, me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln jest washed las' Sat'day. We ain't got to wash no mo' 'till nex' Sat'day," he argued.

"Oh, yes," said his relative; "you must bathe every day."

"Me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln ain't never wash on a Wednesday sence



He Chanted "Now I Lays Me Down to Sleep."

Uncle Jimmy-Jawed Jup'ter play his 'corjun an' sing:

"Rabbit up the gum tree, Coon is in the holler  
Wake, snake; Juney-Bug stole a half a dollar."

"I'll sing you a hymn," said Miss Minerva patiently.

"I don't want to hear you sing no hymn," said Billy impolitely. "I wants to see Sanctified Sophy shout."

As his aunt could think of no substitute with which to tempt him in lieu of Sanctified Sophy's shouting, she remained silent.

"An' I wants Wilkes Booth Lincoln to dance a clog," persisted her nephew.

Miss Minerva remained silent. She felt unable to cope with the situation till she had adjusted her thoughts and made her plans.

Presently Billy, looking at her shrewdly, said:

"Gimme my rabbit foot, Aunt Minerva, an' I'll go right off to sleep."

When she again looked in on him he was fast asleep, a rosy flush on his babyish, tear-stained cheek, his red lips half parted, his curly head pillowed on his arm, and close against his soft, young throat there nestled the left hind foot of a rabbit.

Miss Minerva's bed time was half after nine o'clock, summer or winter. She had hardly varied a second in the years that had elapsed since the runaway marriage of her only relative,

we's born," he protested indignantly.

Billy's idea of a bath was taken from the severe weekly scrubbing which Aunt Cindy gave him with a hard washrag, and he felt that he'd rather die at once than have to bathe every day.

He followed his aunt dolefully to the bathroom at the end of the long back porch of the old-fashioned, one-story house; but once in the big white tub he was delighted.

In fact, he stayed in it so long Miss Minerva had to knock on the door and tell him to hurry up and get ready for breakfast.

"Say," he yelled out to her, "I likes this here; it's mos' as fine as Johnny's Wash Hole, where me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln goes in swimmin' ever sence we's born."

When he came into the dining-room he was a sight to gladden even a prim old maid's heart. The water had curled his hair into riotous yellow ringlets, his bright eyes gleamed, his beautiful, expressive little face shone happily, and every movement of his agile, lithe figure was grace itself.

"I sho' is hongry," he remarked, as he took his seat at the breakfast table.

Miss Minerva realized that now was the time to begin her small nephew's training; if she was ever to teach him to speak correctly she must begin at once.

"William," she said sternly, "you must not talk so much like a negro,



"What I Done Now?" Asked the Boy Innocently.

Instead of saying 'I sho' is hongry,' you should say, 'I am very hungry.' Listen to me and try to speak more correctly."

"Don't! don't!" she screamed as he helped himself to the meat and gravy, leaving a little brown river on her fresh white tablecloth. "Wait until I ask a blessing; then I will help you to what you want."

Billy enjoyed his breakfast very much. "These muffins sho' is—" he began; catching his aunt's eye he corrected himself: "These muffins am very good."

"These muffins are very good," said Miss Minerva patiently.

"Did you ever eat any bobbycued rabbit?" he asked. "Me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln been eatin' chit'lins, an' sweet 'taters, an' 'possum, an' squirrel, an' hoe-cake, an' Brunswick stew ever sence we's born," was his proud announcement.

"Use your napkin," commanded she, "and don't fill your mouth so full."

The little boy flooded his plate with slrup.

"These here 'lasses sho' is—" he began, but instantly remembering that he must be more particular in his speech, he stammered out:

"These here sho' is—am—are a nice messer 'lasses. I ain't never eat sech a good bait. They sho' is—I aimed to say—these 'lasses sho' are a bird; they's 'nother sight tastier'n sorghum, an' Aunt Cindy 'lows that sorghum is the very penury of a nigger."

She did not again correct him.

"I must be very patient," she thought, "and go very slowly. I must not expect too much of him at first."

After breakfast Miss Minerva, who would not keep a servant, preferring to do her own work, tied a big cook-apron around the little boy's neck, and told him to churn while she washed the dishes. This arrangement did not suit Billy.

"Boys don't churn," he said sullenly; "me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln don't never have to churn sence we's born; 'omans has to churn an' I ain't a-going to. Major Minerva—he ain't never churn," he began belligerently, but his relative turned an uncompromising and rather perturbed back on him. Realizing that he was beaten, he submitted to his fate, clutched the dasher angrily, and began his weary work.

He was glad his little black friend did not witness his disgrace.

As he thought of Wilkes Booth Lincoln the big tears came into his eyes and rolled down his cheeks; he leaned away over the churn and the great glistening tears splashed right into the hole made for the dasher, and rolled into the milk.

Billy grew interested at once and laughed aloud; he puckered up his face and tried to weep again, for he wanted more tears to fall into the churn; but the tears refused to come and he couldn't squeeze another one out of his eyes.

"Aunt Minerva," he said mischievously. "I done ruint yo' buttermilk."

"What have you done?" she inquired.

"It's done ruint," he replied, "you'll hafter th'ow it away; 'tain't fitten fer nothin'." I done cried 'bout a bucketful in it."

"Why did you cry?" asked Miss Minerva calmly. "Don't you like to work?"

"Yes'm, I jes' loves to work; I wish I had time to work all the time. But it makes my belly ache to churn—I got a awful pain right now."

"Churn on!" she commanded unsympathetically.

He grabbed the dasher and churned vigorously for one minute.

"I reckon the butter's done come," he announced, resting from his labors.

"It hasn't begun to come yet," replied the exasperated woman. "Don't waste so much time, William."

The child churned in silence for the space of two minutes, and suggested: "It's time to put hot water in it; Aunt Cindy always puts hot water in it. Lemme git some fer you."

"I never put hot water in my milk," said she, "it makes the butter puffy. Work more and talk less, William."

Again there was a brief silence, broken only by the sound of the dasher thumping against the bottom of the churn, and the rattle of the dishes.

"I sho' is tired," he presently remarked, heaving a deep sigh. "My arms is 'bout give out, Aunt Minerva. Ole Aunt Blue-Gum Tempy's Peruny

Pearline see a man churn with his toes; lemme git a chair an' see if I can't churn with my toes."

"Indeed you shall not," responded his annoyed relative positively.

"Sanctified Sophy knowed a colored 'oman what had a little dog went roun' an' roun' an' churn fer her," remarked Billy after a short pause. "If you had a billy boat or a little nannny I could hitch him to the churn fer you ev'ry day."

"William," commanded his aunt, "don't say another word until you have finished your work."

"Can I sing?" he asked.

She nodded permission as she went through the open door into the dining-room.

Returning a few minutes later she found him sitting astride the churn, using the dasher so vigorously that buttermilk was splashing in every direction, and singing in a clear, sweet voice:

"He'll feed you when you's naked, The orphan's tear he'll dry, He'll clothe you when you's hongry An' take you when you die."

Miss Minerva jerked him off with no gentle hand.

"What I done now?" asked the boy innocently. "Tain't no harm as I can see jes' to straddle a churn."

"Go out in the front yard," commanded his aunt, "and sit in the swing till I call you. I'll finish the work without your assistance. And, William," she called after him, "there is a very bad little boy who lives next door; I want you to have as little to do with him as possible."

## CHAPTER IV.

### Sweetheart and Partner.

Billy was sitting quietly in the big lawn-swing when his aunt, dressed for the street, finally came through the front door.

"I am going uptown, William," she said. "I want to buy you some things that you may go with me to church Sunday. Have you ever been to Sunday school?"

"Naw'm; but I been to portracted meetin'," came the ready response. "I see Sanctified Sophy shout tell she tore ev'ry rag offer her back 'ceptin' a shimmy. She's one 'oman who sho' is got 'ligion; she ain't never back-slid 'tall, an' she ain't never fell f'om grace but one time—"

"Stay right in the yard till I come back. Sit in the swing and don't go outside the front yard. I shan't be gone long," said Miss Minerva.

His aunt had hardly left the gate before Billy caught sight of a round, fat little face peering at him through the palings which separated Miss Minerva's yard from that of her next-door neighbor.

"Hello!" shouted Billy. "Is you the bad little boy what can't play with me?"

"What you doing in Miss Minerva's yard?" came the answering interrogation across the fence.

"I's come to live with her," replied Billy. "My mamma an' papa is dead. What's yo' name?"

"I'm Jimmy Garner. How old are you? I'm most six, I am."

"Shucks, I's already six, a-going on seven. Come on, let's swing."

"Can't," said the new acquaintance. "I've runned off once today, and got licked for it."

"I ain't never got no whippin' sence me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln's born," boasted Billy.

"Ain't you?" asked Jimmy. "I 'spos' I been whipp'd more'n a million times, my mamma is so perticular with me. She's 'bout the pertic'larst woman ever was; she don't 'low me to leave the yard 'thout I got a whipping. I believe I will come over to see you 'bout half a minute."

Suiting the action to the word Jimmy climbed the fence, and the two little boys were soon comfortably settled facing each other in the big lawn-swing.

"Who lives over there?" asked Billy, pointing to the house across the street.

"That's Miss Cecelia's house. That's her coming out of the front gate now."

The young lady smiled and waved her hand at them.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Are you ignorant of yourself or do you think to impose yourself upon me as a person you do not know?